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ABSTRACT

This paper by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges clarifies the role of the counseling discipline in the California Community College system, and provides local academic senates with a planning resource to be used when making policy development and implementation recommendations associated with student preparation and success. The paper presents a background on counseling discipline issues, identifies the relationship between the mission of California Community Colleges and the counseling discipline, describes the qualifications, roles, and activities of counseling faculty, and states the appropriate uses and limitations of paraprofessionals in the delivery of counseling services. The paper asserts that students need professional counseling to achieve their educational goals, as research on retention indicates that students perform better when counseling faculty assist them in resolving their inevitable problems and concerns. In conclusion, the Academic Senate argues that counseling services must not, for reasons of financial expediency, be entrusted to untrained professionals or cut altogether, and asserts that computerized information systems and streamlined registration processes do not replace the need for the personal connection between counseling faculty and students. (Contains 10 references.) (CB)

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January 1995

The Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

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Academic Senate
for
California Community Colleges

The Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges

Counseling and Library Faculty Issues
Subcommittee 1993-1994

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Special thanks to the members of the 1993-94 Regional Counseling Facilitators Group, and in particular to Lew Mayhew, Modesto College and Fay Dea, LAValley College for their contributions to this document.

8 COUNSELING

8.1.0 The Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges
Janis Perry, Rancho Santiago College

Whereas counseling is a faculty discipline included in the state approved faculty disciplines list/minimum qualifications. and

Whereas a counseling discipline ensures professional education and training at the Master=s level leading to appropriate counseling knowledge, competencies and skills. and

Whereas there is no statewide definition of or limitations on the role of the counseling/advising paraprofessional, and

Whereas some districts are blurring the roles of professional counseling faculty and misusing paraprofessional in the discipline.

Therefore be it resolved that the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges adopt the paper, AThe Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges.@ (See Appendix B) and affirm the professional role of counseling faculty as presented in the paper, and

Be it further resolved that the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges recommend to local senates that they use the paper when making policy development and implementation recommendations on Astudent preparation and success@ (Title 5. Section 53200 Subsection (b.5)). and program evaluation, hiring priorities, planning and budget, etc., and

Be it finally resolved that the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges urge local senates to use the information in the paper to review and investigate the uses of currently employed counseling paraprofessional on their campuses.

M/S/U Disposition: CCCCA. ClOs. Executive Committee. Local Senates

Fall 1994 Resolutions that were passed

The Role of Counseling Faculty in the California Community Colleges

I. Introduction

At the Fall 1993 Plenary Session of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, Resolution 15.1 was passed stating:

> "Whereas counseling is a distinct faculty discipline within the Faculty Disciplines list, and
>
> Whereas a counseling discipline ensures professional education and training at the Master's level leading to appropriate counseling knowledge, competencies and skills, and
>
> Whereas there is no statewide definition of, or limitations on, the role of the counseling/advising paraprofessional, and
>
> Whereas some districts are replacing counseling faculty with counseling/advising paraprofessional.
>
> Therefore be it resolved that the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges direct the Executive Committee in consultation with counseling faculty, to recommend standards for counseling paraprofessional to the Board of Governors that define the role and scope of persons in paraprofessional counseling positions and ensure that the professional counseling services are not being provided by paraprofessionals."

The purposes of this paper are twofold. First, it clarifies the role of the counseling discipline in the California Community College system. In this time of increased student demand and diminishing resources, this document provides local academic senates with a planning resource to be used when making policy development and implementation recommendations associated with "student preparation and success" (Title 5, Section 53200 (b)(5). Second, it provides a foundation for the discussion on the uses and limits of paraprofessional in the delivery of counseling services.

This paper presents a background on counseling discipline issues, identifies the relationship between the mission of California Community Colleges and the counseling discipline, describes the qualifications, roles, and activities of counseling faculty and states the appropriate uses and limitations of paraprofessionals.

II. Background

In 1979 the Board of Governors received a Task Force Report on the state of counseling in the California Community Colleges. That report provided a clear statement of the educational and sociocultural diversity of the student population and their counseling needs. It eloquently described the need for and the complexity of the counseling role in providing support to students making their way through community colleges. A dominant theme of the report was the need for a generalist--trained in counseling skills and familiar with the entire curriculum - - to work with students (Hirschinger 1979).

Since 1979, beset by the challenges of dramatic growth, a rapidly diversifying student body, variable funding, and new legislative imperatives such as the Matriculation Act and AB 1725, the community colleges have struggled to provide adequate counseling services to their students. The ensuing struggle to meet these imperatives with insufficient resources has resulted in an examination of how counseling services are delivered. Some colleges have employed paraprofessionals (also called counselor assistants, information technicians or educational advisors) to meet some of the demands. Still other colleges have instituted or expanded the role of the instructor advisor. (See Appendix)

As a result, there has been a blurring of the roles and activities of counseling faculty, paraprofessionals, and instructor advisors. For example, some institutions are using personnel from these groups interchangeably, making no distinctions in the types of counseling any one of these groups may provide. Also, there has been a tendency to equate the delivery of the counseling discipline, which can be a complex process requiring a wide range of competencies, with advising, which is a straightforward transmission of information. This blurring of perceived roles contradicts the spirit and intent of AB 1725, which called for the establishment of minimum qualifications for faculty disciplines in order to ensure competence and quality.

III. The Relationship of Counseling to the Mission of the Community Colleges

Quality counseling programs staffed by professional counseling faculty are critical to assure that students achieve their educational and career goals. Today's students face a myriad of complex academic and personal issues and concerns. By helping students identify
those issues and deal effectively with them through academic, career and personal counseling, counseling faculty provide a means for students to be successful both academically and personally.

The relationship between counseling and the success of students was affirmed in the landmark legislation, Assembly Bill 1725 (1988), which reads:

"SECTION 5. The Legislature finds and declares the following with regard to access to the California Community Colleges, and the importance and value of success to those who participate in the system:

(a) It is the responsibility of this state to provide to every Californian the opportunity to realize his or her intellectual, emotional, and vocational potential...

b) It is the joint responsibility of the student and the community college to realize the student's goals and aspirations, which often change during the educational experience...

(c) Open access to community colleges must be assured for all adults who can benefit from instruction, which access is meaningful only if supported by a system of assessment, counseling and placement that assists students in identifying their talents and abilities, directs them to courses that meet their needs, and maintains standards designed to ensure their success."

The Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges in their Basic Agenda have consistently acknowledged the obligation of the community colleges to provide the opportunity for students to succeed, and in Title 5 Regulations recognized the necessity of the counseling discipline to meet that obligation. Section 51975 of Title 5 stated:

"(a) Each college shall employ or ensure provision of an adequate counseling staff, both in training and experience, and shall establish procedures to provide, and shall provide, the counseling services listed in subsections (b) through (d):

(b) The counseling services shall assist each student in the following ways:

(1) To determine the student's educational goals.
(2) To make a self-appraisal toward progress toward the student's goals.

(c) The counseling services shall provide to each first-time freshman described in subdivisions (1) and (2) below, who is enrolled in more than six units, special individual or group counseling and guidance, shall arrange a study load suitable to the needs of each student, and shall keep an appropriate record of each such student....

(d) The counseling services shall provide to each student who is on probation individual counseling and guidance service, including the regulation of the student's program according to the student's aptitude and achievements."

These regulations, since augmented by Matriculation provisions Title 5, Section 51018, demonstrated the Board of Governors' commitment to providing adequate counseling services to all students. Moreover, local community college districts are

mandated to provide academic counseling, career counseling, personal counseling, and coordination of services to all students, traditional and non-traditional, by counseling faculty. In addition, these Matriculation provisions call for specialized services to three target populations: undeclared students, students registered in basic skills classes, and students identified by Aearly alert@ programs to be at risk for failure.

Despite the fact that counseling is required by law, there is little evidence that it is sufficiently provided. Two facts bear this out:

First, about 40% of all students, as reported by all colleges, were not offered any counseling or advising as required by the Matriculation Act. At many colleges, the figure is closer to 50%. At six colleges, fewer than 20% of students receive counseling or advising,
(Bray 1994). Yet many comparable colleges provide counseling services for two-thirds or more of their students, so funding itself is not the reason for this embarrassing discrepancy. This lack of counseling has occurred even though for years the matriculation act has targeted additional funds to districts to provide adequate counseling to students.

Second, the median ratio of students to counselors in the community colleges in 1992 stood at over 1700 to 1. At one quarter of the colleges it stood at over 1900 to 1 (Lorimer 1993). Moreover, the range is quite variable, from a low of 780 to 1 to as high as 5000 to 1. Since funding for community colleges has diminished further since 1992, there is good reason to believe that these ratios have gotten even worse. Given these ratios, it would be difficult to argue that sufficient counseling services are being provided.

But the statistic most alarming to the community college system and its commitment to student success may just now be coming to light. In a study of all 19,000 new students, collected over five years, at a large, well-respected suburban California community college, researchers found that at the end of their first semester, fully half of all student grades were D, F, NC, or W (Rasor 1994). This failure must not be dismissed as the price of open success. It is too costly to society to lose this opportunity to educate and too wasteful of institutional resources to fail. If colleges accept the mission of student success, they must make more effort to bring about that success.

Counseling faculty can play many roles to combat that sobering statistic and help meet the mission of California Community Colleges. For example, counselors can deter students from disastrous self-placements and impossible workloads--the causes of many of their failures. They can help students develop hope, confidence, and commitment to realistic aspirations. They can also help students whose academic abilities do not yet match their aspirations. Thus, colleges have the obligation to provide counseling programs to help students decide what they want from higher education, plan their route through the system to achieve these goals, and help them overcome the barriers that may impede progress toward those goals.

IV. Counseling Faculty: Qualifications, Roles and Activities

Counseling faculty are professionally trained to diagnose the difficulties students face in the educational arena, to prescribe solutions for those difficulties, and to support students during their struggle toward success. Crucial to doing this effectively is understanding the students' stated goals in the context of human development and the inevitable changes that occur as they undertake college education. Even when students present clear goals, counseling faculty understand that
students change as the result of their unfolding education or personal situations. This requires careful attention to cues that suggest students need assistance in reevaluating their goals.

In these tasks, the role of counseling faculty is unique among the faculty of community colleges. The counselor's role is even more crucial to student success when we consider that it is not just likely that students at community colleges will encounter difficulties--it is almost inevitable.

The minimum qualifications identified in the Disciplines List adopted by the Board of Governors specify a "Master's in counseling, rehabilitation counseling, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, guidance counseling, educational counseling, social work, career development, California license in marriage, family and child counseling or the equivalent." The professional education and training required of community college counseling faculty enable them to play a variety of roles and offer a range of activities to meet students' counseling needs.

The counseling mission defined by the Board of Governors in a 1979 task force report on counseling addresses the multidimensional nature of counseling and its importance to student success:

> "Simply stated, the mission of community college counseling and guidance is to assist the individual with decisions which affect educational, vocational and personal goals, and to provide appropriate support and instruction which will enable the individual to implement these decisions. These may include career, educational, academic choice, or personal-social decisions. The implementation may include selection of appropriate institutions, academic planning, financial aid, dealing with learning handicaps, making the transition from the community college to work or to an appropriate higher level college or university, and assistance in handling personal, family or social problems which may interfere with educational goal attainment.
>
> While a variety of activities are utilized by counseling and guidance departments--including unique programs for special clientele such as veterans; the returning older student; the disabled, minorities and culturally different:. economically-

deprived individuals, and those with learning handicaps--common components are usually present. These components reflect the underlying philosophy of counseling: that of providing information, clarification, and support which will enable individuals to make realistic decisions which are in their own self interests and additionally to assist the person in planning implementing strategies to achieve these ends." (Hirshinger, 1979)

The Education Code's definition of the role of counseling faculty reiterates the critical responsibility of the counselor to support student success in such areas as student self-assessment, decision-making, goal setting, and goal implementation. Section 51018 lists the following four functions for counseling programs:

"(1) Academic counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing, planning and implementing his or her immediate and long-range academic goals.

(2) Career counseling, in which the student is assisted in assessing his or her aptitudes, abilities, and interests, and is advised concerning the current and future employment trends.

(3) Personal counseling, in which the student is assisted with personal, family or other social concerns, when that assistance is related to the student's education.

(4) Coordination with the counseling aspects of other services to students which may exist on the campus, including, but not limited to, those provided in programs for students with special needs, skills testing programs, financial assistance programs, and job placement services.....@

These distinctions are somewhat arbitrary in light of the mix of concerns students present to counseling faculty in a single session. For example, it is not uncommon for a request for transfer information to evolve into a session about handling intense parental pressure or doubts about career direction. Student disclosures of substance abuse or sexual abuse may occur in sessions ostensibly dealing with career decision making. And sessions about academic difficulties may uncover learning disabilities. These examples illustrate the complex needs students bring to counselors in the community colleges. These problems require counseling faculty to respond with an array of professional skills, sensitivities, and counseling techniques, all grounded in an understanding of human development. The fact is that most interactions with students regarding academic matters require sensitive counseling evaluations and are not, as some believe, simply the provision of curriculum information.

With the recent increase in emphasis on academic counseling, assessment, and development of student educational plans, some counseling faculty are concerned that career and personal counseling services have been reduced. Preliminary research (Froehlich 92) suggests this may be the case.

When career counseling is reduced, students may spend more time in college, spend more effort than necessary wrestling with career decisions, remain as undeclared majors, take a number of courses without a sense of purpose, lose motivation and drop out, or, in fact, obtain a degree without a clear career goal. A counselor's help through this natural struggle could be so effective. In the words of Vincent Tinto, recognized leader in retention research,

> "Three out of every four college students will experience some form of educational or occupational uncertainty during the course of their college careers, and that uncertainty among new students will frequently increase rather than decrease during the first two years of college. Not only should we not be surprised by such movements, we should expect, indeed hope, that they occur. It is regrettable that some institutions treat it as a deficiency." (Tinto, 1987)

Personal counseling is also critical to ensure the success of many of our students. Young students experiencing the stress of their transition into adulthood, and reentry students balancing the burdens of work, family and academics are both bound to face times of conflict and confusion, where their goals are undermined by their personal conflicts. Students with psychological disabilities, protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, must also receive assistance. Students who experience crisis situations while on campus need to be assisted with sensitive counseling. Personal counseling benefits many kinds of students, helping them manage their difficult life situations while they progress in college.

The regulations of the Education Code call for action by counseling faculty with the appropriate qualifications to respond to students' needs. The nation's graduate programs in counseling have gone to great lengths to standardize the competencies expected of degree recipients. The list of competencies below has been drawn from materials supplied by California State University graduate programs in counseling. Although not meant to be an exhaustive list, it begins to define the specialized skills of counseling professionals.

- knowledge of human development, both normal and abnormal
- understanding of the theories of counseling and personality
- knowledge of and sensitivity to social, cultural, and ethnic issues
- knowledge of ethical and legal aspects of counseling
- knowledge of the learning process
- knowledge of decision making and transition models
- ability to diagnose student problems
- ability to help students form and clarify their educational values and goals
- ability to help students learn problem-solving and decision-making skills
- ability to work with students to develop optimal student educational plans
- ability to facilitate groups and workshops
- ability to develop effective curriculum
- knowledge of effective instructional methods and strategies
- ability to teach counseling courses effectively

- ability to provide crisis intervention and support
- ability to provide mental health counseling and referral to community resources
- knowledge of career development methods, techniques, and instruments
- knowledge of changes taking place in the economy and the job market
- knowledge of the use and misuse of assessment instruments and test data
- knowledge of educational programs and their requirements
- knowledge of the structure and institutional relationships of higher education
- ability to develop and coordinate service programs
- ability to provide effective consultation to students, teachers, peers, administrators, and community members.

Counseling should be provided in the context of the student's educational needs. A student's need for counseling may extend beyond its educational ramifications or extend for a duration beyond the resources of the counseling department to provide such services. Referral is indicated in cases where other interventions are needed or desired.

V. The Uses and Limitations of Paraprofessionals

Although paraprofessionals (also called counselor assistants, information technicians, educational advisors) have for some time been employed by universities, where student needs are less varied and goals are more concrete, they have only recently begun to appear in significant numbers on community college campuses. Paraprofessionals can support counseling faculty and students, just as instructional assistants help instructional faculty in the classroom. However, there is concern that they might be pressed into roles inappropriate for and beyond their qualifications.

The amount of education and/or experience required of paraprofessionals has not been established at the state level. Each district that has hired paraprofessionals has set its own standards. These standards have varied with the nature of the tasks required of the position. Frequently, the paraprofessional is someone who possesses an Associate or Bachelor's degree and/or may have student services experience. Paraprofessionals might also be community college or other college students. While the specific qualifications for a given position might differ, three crucial issues must be considered: first, that the competencies expected of paraprofessionals need to be defined explicitly, with the full participation of the counseling faculty; second, that paraprofessionals need to be trained and supervised carefully with full participation of the counseling staff; and last that paraprofessionals not be expected to perform tasks beyond their qualifications.

To identify the appropriate roles of paraprofessionals it is necessary to clarify the activities that do not require the minimum qualifications of the counseling discipline. The following is a list of such potential activities:

(1) Assisting at registration by providing information and referring students to campus offices and services: This information might include important dates and deadlines or how to read a class schedule. Paraprofessionals can also assist

students in scheduling classes once the course list or student educational plan has been developed by counseling faculty.

(2) Providing information about program requirements: Many counseling departments prepare materials about college programs to help students plan their schedules. Paraprofessionals could disseminate this information.

(3) Facilitating and supporting activities: There are many useful activities that paraprofessionals could provide in Transfer Centers, Career Centers, Assessment Centers, Disabled Student Programs, and Extended Opportunity Programs. They might assist students in using reference materials or computerized career information systems. Paraprofessionals might coordinate university tours or visits by university representatives. They might design and organize advertising for center activities. They might also make classroom presentations to students about the services of variouscampus offices and programs. They might give out placement test results, as long as their interpretation is left to faculty. They also might assist with community outreach, such as visits to high schools.

It is important to clarify the limits of the use of paraprofessionals in order to protect the integrity of the counseling discipline. When activities with students go beyond providing specific requested information--into the areas of goal setting, planning, and decision making--the student needs to be referred to a counseling faculty member. What may have begun with a routine question about a course may lead quickly to the reasons for the choice, the career goals associated with the choice, or the appropriateness of the major, program, or transfer institution. These concerns are within the scope of the established minimum qualifications for counseling faculty and go beyond the competency and qualifications of paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals must be careful not to venture into academic counseling, where they would be called upon to interpret, advise, or judge the appropriateness of a student's course or program choice. These activities are beyond the scope of their qualifications. For this reason, paraprofessionals should not advise undeclared students or students on probation, nor should they produce Student Educational Plans.

Furthermore, interpreting assessment results for students or weighing multiple measures for course placement are also not appropriate activities for paraprofessionals. Such interpretations require knowledge of assessment methods, and the use of professional judgement, which belong properly with faculty trained to perform these functions.

VI. Conclusion

From the day of first access to the day of success, students need professional counseling to achieve their educational goals. Research on retention indicates that

students perform better when counseling faculty assist students in resolving their inevitable problems and concerns (Brophy 83). This role must not, for reasons of financial expediency, be devolved to others. Computerized information systems and streamlined registration processes do not replace the need for the personal connection between counseling faculty and students.

The law has long recognized and continues to remind us of students' need for counseling. In the spirit of those laws, this document has been focused on clarifying and reaffirming the pivotal role of counseling faculty in serving students.

APPENDIX

Instructor Advisors: Qualifications, Roles and Activities

Key to retention is a student's sense that the institution is interested in his or her success. An advising role is one vehicle for instructional faculty to express that interest.

Qualifications

Instructor Advisors should have the minimum qualifications to teach in the subject area in which they provide advising. Moreover, they should exhibit the following competencies:

- an ability to interact nonjudgementally with students, using effective helping skills.

- an interest in being an advisor (no one should be assigned advising responsibilities automatically).

Roles and Activities

(1) Providing information regarding programs, career opportunities, and course selection in their disciplines.

(2) Referring students to appropriate services: The instructor advisor can provide a link for the student with other essential services: financial aid, career center, services for students with disabilities, tutoring center, health center, counseling center, etc. These referrals are necessary whenever the student wishes to discuss matters beyond the role and expertise of the instructor advisor.

(3) Coordinating with counseling departments: Instructional faculty have much discipline-related information they can provide to counseling departments; counseling staff have skills and training which they can impart to advisors. Instructors who advise and the counselors who train them share the responsibility to make instructor advising activities a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, counseling services.

Limitations

Colleges using instructor advisors should develop clear procedures and document them in writing. They should provide sufficient training for the advisor to be successful.

APPENDIX

It is important that all parties understand the following distinctions between counseling and advising, and that instructor advisors are clear about issues that should be referred to a counselor.

Advising focuses on giving students the information they need to reach their stated goals. Advisors explain and clarify this information for students and present their material in a manner sympathetic to the needs and situation of the student. Advising responds to student requests for discipline-specific information.

Counseling is required when the student needs more than just specific information. When goals are not yet set, when decisions are not yet made, when the problem goes beyond a need for data, the student needs counseling. In this context, it is not appropriate for advisors to advise undecided or probationary students who, by the nature of their situation, require counseling. Nor is it appropriate for advisors to be called counselors. This only adds to the confusion of students about the roles of the individuals serving them.

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